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Environment Department Postpones Hearing on WIPP High-Level Waste Prohibition, Continues Focus on LANL Issues

(Santa Fe, NM) — The New Mexico Environment Department (NMED) today postponed the public hearing and extended the comment period for the state's proposed permit modification for the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP) located near Carlsbad. The length of the extension is 60 days.

“Due to the voluminous nature of the filings we have received so far from the Department of Energy and other interested parties, NMED will use this time to carefully go through these thousands of pages of documents,” said NMED Secretary Ron Curry. “This delay will also allow us to continue to focus our staff time and resources on Los Alamos. Reaching agreement with the lab on an enforceable clean up order is still this Department's number one priority.”

The NMED proposed modification to WIPP's permit seeks to ensure that this facility remains solely devoted to the disposal of low-level transuranic waste. By modifying WIPP's permit to make sure that DOE's assurances to the State of New Mexico remain unchanged, reclassified high-level waste, such as tank sludge currently at DOE's Hanford, INEEL and Savannah River facilities, would be prohibited from WIPP disposal.

“Just like the fence-to-fence clean up order for LANL is NMED's Job 1, prohibiting high-level waste remains our highest priority at WIPP,” said Secretary Curry. “As far as WIPP priorities go, this issue will continue to garner most of our attention until it is resolved. We need to make sure that the promises made to New Mexico over the years by DOE are kept.”

The public hearing on this proposal had been scheduled to begin on April 6. It will now run for four days beginning on June 1 and another four, if necessary, beginning on July 6. The public comment period on this proposed permit modification remains open until the hearing is concluded. Written comments can be sent to the NMED Hazardous Waste Bureau, 2905 Rodeo Park Drive East, Building 1, Santa Fe, New Mexico, 87505-6303.

A draft of NMED's proposal is available online at www.nmenv.state.nm.us/wipp.

For further information contact Jon Goldstein, Communications Director, NMED at (505) 827-0314.

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